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REMARKS

The application has been carefully reviewed in light of the Office Action dated November 14, 2006. Claims 1, 4, and 18 to 20 are in the application, with Claim 1 being independent. Claims 5 to 14, 16, and 17 have been cancelled without prejudice. Claim 1 has been amended, and Claims 19 and 20 have been newly added. The specification has been amended. Reconsideration and further examination are respectfully requested.

Objections were lodged against the drawings for not including reference signs mentioned in the description. The objections are respectfully traversed.

With respect to objection (vi), Applicants note that reference numeral "440A" was added to Figure 7B in the replacement drawing sheet submitted with the March 1, 2006 Amendment. Accordingly, the drawings include reference numeral 400A, which is all that is required. There is no need for both Figures 6 and 7B to include this reference numeral, especially since the specification describes that Figure 7B is a schematic and sectional view of the mask shown in Figure 6. See page 14, lines 10 to 12 of the instant specification.

With respect to the other drawing objections, Applicants respectfully submit that these objections have been obviated by the amendments made to the specification.

A new title and a new abstract have been provided, as required by the Office Action.

The specification was objected to for alleged informalities. The objection is respectfully traversed, and is submitted to have been obviated by the amendments made to the specification.

Claims 1, 4, 17, and 18 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph. The rejection is respectfully traversed, and is submitted to have been obviated by the amendments made to Claim 1.

Claims 1, 4, and 18 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over either U.S. Patent No. 6,171,730 (Kuroda '730) or U.S. Patent No. 6,187,482 (Kuroda '482) in view of the Alkaisi article (Alkaisi). Claim 17 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over Kuroda '730 or Kuroda '482 in view of Alkaisi, and further in view of U.S. Publication No. 2002/0196420 (Naya), U.S. Patent No. 5,726,757 (Kato), U.S. Publication No. 2003/0044730 (Fujimoto), or U.S. Patent No. 6,523,748 (Nishikata). These rejections are respectfully traversed.

According to a feature of the invention as recited by Claim 1, the exposure light is circularly polarized light. By virtue of this feature, it is possible to include all polarized components in the exposure light, such that near-field light passing through the opening has an even intensity. See, for example, page 52, line 9 to page 53, line 17 of the instant specification.

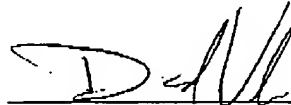
None of Kuroda '730, Kuroda '482, Alkaisi, Naya, Kato, Fujimoto, and Nishikata, even in the proposed combinations, assuming, *arguendo*, that such could be combined, is seen to disclose or suggest at least the foregoing feature.

The dependent claims are also submitted to be patentable because they set forth additional aspects of the present invention and are dependent from the independent claim discussed above. Therefore, separate and individual consideration of each dependent claim is respectfully requested.

The application is believed to be in condition for allowance, and a Notice of Allowance is respectfully requested.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Costa Mesa, California office by telephone at (714) 540-8700. All correspondence should be directed to our address given below.

Respectfully submitted,



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